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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GR](#) [MK](#)
SUBJECT: PM KARAMANLIS RAISES THE MACEDONIA STAKES AS
ELECTORAL PRESSURE MOUNTS

REF: A) ATHENS 1659 B) ATHENS 1618 C) ATHENS 1594

Classified By: CHARGE TOM COUNTRYMAN. REASON: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During the September 6 pre-election TV debate -- and in a September 7 press conference -- PM Karamanlis publicly took a hard line on the Macedonia name issue, threatening to veto Macedonia's NATO (and EU) accession unless the issue was resolved first. With unofficial polls showing the governing New Democracy maintaining only a fractional lead over its rivals, Karamanlis is clearly using the issue to win (or keep) crucial votes in northern Greece. But the stronger Karamanlis's rhetoric, the less flexibility he will have to resolve the issue, should ND eke out a narrow win. END SUMMARY.

KARAMANLIS GOES PUBLIC WITH VETO THREAT

¶2. (SBU) In an otherwise lackluster September 6 TV debate, PM Karamanlis took a hard line on Macedonia. When asked directly whether Greece had already "lost" on the name issue, Karamanlis responded that, despite good relations, "An issue exists. The name issue. We have indicated our willingness to resolve this issue but this requires a response from the other side. We have seen no such willingness. From the moment there is no willingness to find a mutually acceptable name, Skopje will not join any international organization whether this is called NATO or EU. This is the truth and this is my clear position." Asked whether his statement was a "commitment to veto Skopje's accession to NATO and the EU if the name issue remains pending," Karamanlis responded: "What I am saying is -- yes, I have told you that -- what I am saying is that the country does not willingly abandon any of its levers of pressure during an negotiating process or in any foreign policy process."

¶3. (SBU) Not surprisingly, journalists followed up during Karamanlis's September 7 press conference in Thessaloniki. Asked again whether he would veto Macedonia's NATO (and EU) entry if no solution to the name issue was found, Karamanlis responded that "If it does not do this, we cannot in practice support its Euro-Atlantic prospects. . . . Beyond that, we will not reveal all the maneuvers that the government can and must carry out on such an issue in advance." Karamanlis added that he would "not allow anyone to present himself as more sensitive on this issue" than he was.

COMMENT: WHY DID HE DO IT?

¶4. (C) Karamanlis's last, emotional, statement is telling. In a tight electoral race, Karamanlis is particularly concerned about the threat from the right: the northern-based, nationalist LAOS party. Nots for votes on this issue, the higher the cost, as he limits his post-election flexibility on the name issue. Given the closeness of this election, however, Karamanlis may calculate that the high price is worth it to win.

